

Appendix II

Information Inventory Review

At the end of each discussion group, participants were asked fill out a form that included questions about their needs for environmental information. Participants were asked what types of information they consider most important and how they would like to obtain this information. In addition, the questionnaire included questions about the participants' ages, education levels, and access to various information media such as the television, newspaper, and computer.

In response to a question asking participants to list the three types of information they consider most important, participants gave a very broad range of answers. The following is a list of the general categories that respondents chose as priority information for their own stakeholder group.

Media-Specific: Data and information characterized by its medium (water, air, ground).

Statistics/Trends: Sets of data, statistics, and trends.

Geographic Data: Data described by its location (local, state, national, global).

Accessibility/Metadata: The understanding of information and data by different levels of users (lay person, academic, engineer). This category also includes the physical process of getting data from EPA.

Standards/Regulations: Information related to any environmental standard and regulation. This may include more general areas, such as the ease of understanding regulations, uniform enforcement of regulations, and information on how to comply.

Education: Educational and outreach programs that target the general public and/or children.

Information Sources: Studies, publications, reports, Web sites, charts, maps, posters, etc. that provide environmental data and information.

Public Impact: Investigation/discovery of “newsworthy” issues that may have a short or long-term impact on public health or economic welfare, including emergency situations, locations of Superfund sites, etc.

Understanding EPA: EPA contact information, including program and individual staff responsibilities, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc. Also includes working together with EPA in stakeholder groups to create better communication and understanding of both EPA and stakeholder needs and concerns.

EPA Access: Physical access to EPA experts, assistance, teacher and student training, scientific testing equipment, grants, and other monetary resources.

Demographics: Population issues, including disease/outbreak control.

Librarians

Region III Public Meeting 1 brought together a group of public, university, and Federal agency librarians and other information service representatives. Because the CEIS/EMPACT study did not include librarians, this group offers a perspective that is new and unique to EPA. Not only does this group offer a sense of the types of information sought by the general public, but also identifies the special needs of those who organize, store, and archive EPA's information.

Participants indicate on the Information Inventory the three most important types of environmental information that EPA should be providing. This group places a priority on media specific information, statistics/trends, geographic data, and accessibility/metadata. Information needs of this group are heavily influenced by patrons of the different libraries and information services. In the academic libraries, visitors generally search for raw data and statistics to perform studies. In the public libraries, patrons are often search for answers to questions about situations that affect them more personally, making the availability of geographically-relevant information on air and water quality critically important. Participants deal with many different types of people, including members of academia, the sciences, and the general public. The librarians note the importance of information provided in a way that is accessible to people with different levels of understanding. In the Information Inventory, this translates into a priority for accessibility/metadata.

The Information Inventory asks participants to choose their three top choices for obtaining the information they consider "most important." The Internet is the most frequent priority and most participants indicate they have access to computers at home and at work. However, the inventories show that some are not able or choose not to use computers at work for Internet access or E-mail, and indicate that most are still very dependent on printed materials. Many members of the group agree that it is very important to have additional means of accessing information, such as printed materials and CD ROMs, particularly for long documents or documents containing a lot of graphics which can often be difficult, time-consuming, and sometimes costly to download or print. While many group members appreciate the Internet and would like to see more information on the Internet, all also agree that a mechanism needs to be created to archive data that is only published electronically.

The Information Inventory asks participants to indicate how often the information they consider "most important" should be updated. This group is more concerned with ability to regularly access information than the immediate timeliness of information, and is predominantly interested in receiving yearly and quarterly updates.

On average, the group rates how well EPA is currently providing the information they need at 5.2 on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the worst and 10 being the best.

Media Interests

Region III Public Meeting 2 brought together a group of media representatives from print media, television, and radio stations. Because the CEIS/EMPACT study did not include media interests, this group offers to EPA a look at the types of information most commonly desired by the media to present to the general public, and the unique needs of the media in acquiring this information. Understanding and working to become more responsive to media needs puts EPA in a position to get better, more understandable information out to the public more quickly, and may allow the public to gain a more positive perspective on EPA activities through enhanced knowledge.

Participants of this group indicate on the Information Inventory the three most important types of environmental information that EPA should be providing. This group indicates that they are often in search of information on “newsworthy” issues, which typically have an impact on public health or economic welfare. Specific examples include locations of Superfund clean-up sites and environmental emergencies. In their discussion, some members of the group say they also like to report on stories with a positive spin. Placing a priority on standards/regulation and media-specific data, this group emphasizes the importance of having access to environmental trends up to the present time and environmental information that is very current to support stories.

The Information Inventory asks participants to choose their three top choices for obtaining the information they consider “most important.” The group identifies Internet and Special Phone Number most often and equally as the most important way to get information. These choices support this group’s unique need to access reliable, quotable information quickly for two distinct reasons. Participants say they must have easy, quick phone access to “talking heads” and a few reliable, consistent contacts at EPA Program Offices who can provide them with up-to-date, accurate information on stories and quotable comments. They require up-to-date numbers and statistics that they can get quickly to support news stories. The Internet can be a good source of up-to-date information for media staff who are faced with deadlines, especially when EPA employees are not available (evening or weekends). With regard to getting information from EPA on late breaking news or stories, many participants agree that they do not like to be called on the phone, but would prefer to receive concise, one-page faxes early and throughout the day. This idea was supported in the inventory, where several participants wrote in their preference of getting faxed information, although it was not an option provided within the bounds of the Inventory.

The Information Inventory asks participants to indicate how to update the “most important” information. As presenters of late-breaking news to the public, this group wants information updated frequently, and indicates that they would like the majority of information updated weekly or as often as needed.

On average, the group rates how well EPA is currently providing the information they need at 6.8 on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the worst and 10 is the best.

Local Environmental Groups

Region III Public Meeting 3 was attended by three representatives of local East Maryland shore environmental interest groups. The results of this group are skewed, as revealed through the results of the Inventory of Information Needs questionnaire. While all three of the group members are highly educated, two are over the age of 70, and of these two neither has access to a computer at home or at work. This group illustrates how many of the smaller local environmental groups are “low-tech,” and may not have the same levels of access to information as many of the large, well-known national groups.

Participants indicate on the Information Inventory the three most important types of environmental information that EPA should be providing. Group members need the names of EPA contacts they can turn to for information on particular issues or program areas. They are also interested in learning the particular responsibilities under EPA programs versus other agencies that also have responsibilities in similar areas, such as fisheries, so they know which agency to call for information on specific issues. Participants also agree that more and better public education programs are necessary to make the public more aware of and interested in environmental issues, and, by garnering public support, assist them in their own missions of protecting the natural environment.

The Information Inventory asks participants to choose their three top choices for obtaining the information they consider “most important.” The group identifies printed material as a priority most often, and this preference is supported throughout the discussion. Two of the group members do not use computers at work or at home and rely primarily on printed materials. Despite the preference for printed materials by these two group members, the growing importance and dependence of others on the Internet is still recognized by the group as a whole, and is highlighted as the second best way to obtain environmental information. This group also indicates that they are highly dependent on their self-developed network of knowledgeable phone contacts, and, as discussed above, would like to obtain a phone directory of good contacts at EPA who they can depend on for information about particular issues. In addition, group members asked for an 800 number to call at EPA for directory assistance which would save money, since non-paid volunteers are often responsible for long distance phone bills.

The Information Inventory asks participants to indicate how often the information they consider “most important” should be updated. This group relies heavily on printed books and materials for information, they are less concerned with timeliness, and only require yearly and quarterly updates.

On average, the group rates how well EPA is currently providing the information they need at 3.7 on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the worst and 10 is the best.

Small Business Interests

Region III Public Meeting 4 was attended by representatives of small and medium-sized businesses. The results of the Inventory of Information Needs questionnaire show that this group focusses its attention on regulatory issues, and particularly the difficulty in compliance requirements. Half the members of this group did not attend college and one did not complete high school. Many say that they rarely have the time or the resources to hire additional staff and consultants to assist them in the process of understanding regulations. This may indicate that many people running small businesses require a greater level of support to understand and comply with environmental regulations than is currently being offered by EPA.

Participants indicate on the Information Inventory the three most important types of environmental information that EPA should be providing. This group overwhelmingly replied that they require better information on environmental regulations on many levels. Responses include:

- Easy-to-understand regulations;
- Industry-specific regulations and guidance;
- Simple steps on how to comply;
- Proven compliance methods;
- Common practices and technologies that will help improve processes; and
- Training seminars on regulations.

These information needs, as well as improvements to the process of acquiring information and assistance, are repeated throughout the discussion. Some group members suggest industry-specific contacts they can call at EPA who understand the regulations and compliance information specific to industries such as auto repair, dry cleaning, and electroplating.

The Information Inventory asks participants to choose their three top choices for obtaining the information they consider “most important.” The Internet was chosen most frequently. All participants have computer access at home and at work, and indicate high levels of usage. However, participants indicate in the discussion that they find the EPA Web site difficult to navigate, and suggest industry-specific pages that describe the relevant and new regulations. Participants also chose printed materials as a secondary preference. Their discussion indicates that they would like to receive printed materials and announcements about new regulations and guidance through their associations. Finally, participants say that special industry-specific phone numbers and contacts would also be useful.

The Information Inventory asks participants to indicate how often the information they consider “most important” should be updated. This group is predominantly concerned with acquiring and understanding regulatory information and updates and is less concerned about timeliness. They predominantly desire yearly and quarterly updates.

On average, the group rates how well EPA is currently providing the information they need at 2.8, on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is worst and 10 is best.

Environmental Educators

Region III Public Meeting 5 brought together science and biology teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools. This results of this group provide EPA with insight to the types of assistance and partnering opportunities educators believe will best help them to teach students the importance of environmental protection.

Participants indicate, on the Information Inventory, the three most important types of environmental information that EPA should be providing. Overall, group information needs are most often related to accessing EPA experts, training programs, and monetary resources. During the discussion, members of the group repeatedly expressed the need to work with EPA and other schools to develop an outdoor educational program, where EPA would provide access to a test site, sampling equipment, on-site training experts, and follow-up support. The Inventory and discussion indicate that group members would like EPA to facilitate the sharing of test results between schools, to make the results more meaningful to the students. Group participants also indicate a significant need for up-to-date, geographic, environmental data for use in lessons and for indoor lab projects. In particular, many participants say that they would like to use data to teach national environmental issues on a local level. Many members of this group also indicate that they rely heavily on the Internet to find data and information, as well as projects and labs, and would like EPA to provide direction on good Internet sources and Web sites that contain age-appropriate environmental activities for students.

The questionnaire also asked participants to choose their three top, “most important” ways to obtain environmental information. This group prefers to obtain most of their environmental information as printed material. During the discussion, group members highlight their preference of having EPA mail information, such as educational program opportunities and contact information, and request that the information be sent to their school addresses printed on brightly colored paper to distinguish it from the other mail they receive. Group members comment during the discussion on the usefulness of student handouts. In the open-ended comment section of the inventory, one member requests brochures of EPA focus issues and concerns. Group members also emphasize that they need printed materials with graphics, such as posters, that show data in charts and tables. Participants chose the Internet as the second best way to get environmental information, and suggest that EPA consider a special section on their Web site for educators providing useful activities and laboratories for the classroom for all age levels. The newspaper was also chosen as a top way to obtain information, cited during the discussion as a great way of learning about local and national environmental issues and concerns for use in daily lessons.

The Information Inventory asks participants to indicate how often the information they consider “most important” should be updated. This group, looking often for new projects and lessons for their students, requires quarterly and monthly updates.

On average, the group rates how well EPA is currently providing the information they need at 2.9, on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is worst and 10 is best.